

Major shifts ahead in Senate districts

Politicians will play musical chairs

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Population shifts throughout south Louisiana — combined with some good old-fashioned political maneuvering — promise to yield a dramatically different state Senate map when lawmakers convene next month for a special session on redistricting.

While the area's senators, including Senate President Joel Chaisson II of Destrehan, say the

2010 CENSUS
NUMBERS FOR
NEW ORLEANS
AREA SENATE
DISTRICTS
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process is fluid, interviews and an analysis of census data suggest a growing consensus that New Orleans will lose at least one of three districts contained entirely in the parish while St. Tammany Parish could have for the first time at least one self-contained Senate district. The river region reaching toward Baton Rouge also will gain political clout to reflect growth.

But myriad questions arise beyond those certainties: How is New Orleans realigned given the pressure from the U.S. Justice Department to avoid reducing the number of majority African-American districts? Given that none of the sitting senators in Orleans and Jefferson parishes is term-limited, which of them might have to face off for re-election this fall in a new district?

How will the redrawing of overpopulated north shore and river region districts and underpopulated south shore districts,

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NORTH SHORE, RIVER PARISHES WILL BENEFIT IN REDISTRICTING

SENATE, *from A-1*

including in the east bank of Jefferson Parish, affect the handful of West Bank districts with the population to remain intact?

And, one of the keys to the rest of the region: What becomes of Sen. Julie Quinn's awkwardly shaped district that ties together disparate portions of Uptown New Orleans, Metairie and high-growth areas of St. Tammany and Tangipahoa parishes across Lake Pontchartrain?

"Each senator will have input," Senate President Joel Chaisson II, D-Destrehan, promised. "It will be a process of give and take."

Chaisson is in a prime position to mediate, not just as the presiding officer, but also because term limits bar him from seeking reelection. To boot, his River Parishes district has grown significantly since the 2000 census, giving him residents to spare when shaping the 39-district puzzle.

The ideal target population for a new district 116,240. The federal civil rights office that must approve Louisiana's maps historically has allowed a range of plus or minus 5 percent, in this case 110,428 to 122,052.

Statewide, 24 of the 39 Senate districts are outside that range. In southeast Louisiana, just two of 14 districts — West Bank districts represented by John Alario, R-Westwego, and David Heitmeier, D-Algiers — fall in the accepted count.

Big changes in New Orleans

Newly elected Sen. Cynthia Willard Lewis of eastern New Orleans, faces the largest deficit in the state, with a population that is 44,560 short of the lowest end of the permissible range and 50,372 short of ideal. Sens. Ed Murray, Karen Carter Peterson and J.P. Morrell have smaller, but still significant shortfalls. Murray and Peterson currently represent only New Orleans. Morrell's district crosses the Mississippi River into Jefferson Parish.

The challenge is that those four districts combined total just under 300,000. Adding Quinn's portion of Uptown pushes the total to about 320,000, still shy of what's necessary for three complete districts.

An additional consideration is racial distribution. All of the Orleans-only districts, along with Morrell's and Heitmeier's multiparish districts, are majority African-American. The Voting Rights Act does not specifically bar reducing the number of majority-black districts, but lawmakers have made clear that they don't want to push the issue beyond the obvious necessity of reducing the New Orleans count by one and adding a majority African-American district elsewhere, probably Baton Rouge.

That means it's not an option for Peterson or Murray to claim Quinn's Uptown swath, even if Quinn was amenable. Just 1,703 of her 22,599 New Orleans constituents are black.

The racial balance also suggests that it won't be as simple as Willard-Lewis merely extending her eastern New Orleans district west into Morrell's Gentilly-West Bank district. Because Willard-Lewis has the highest concentration of black residents — 85 percent — she may have to give up some precincts even as she aims for an adequate population total.

Neither Willard-Lewis nor Murray responded to a request for comment.

Peterson and Morrell said the best solution will be found in looking at additional multiparish districts. Morrell called it a "luxury" for New Orleans to have had three self-contained districts to begin with.

Those parameters could mean Murray, Morrell and Willard-Lewis drawn into two districts that reach east-west across much of the city, while Peterson seeks to claim population, particularly African-Americans, in Jefferson Parish.

Quinn's district spans lake

In Jefferson Parish, Sens. Danny Martiny and Conrad Appel both need to add voters. Quinn's district is now overpopulated, but only because of north shore growth. Quinn, a Republican, recognizes that Martiny and Appel may need population from her Metairie precincts, but she said she wants to remain on the south shore where her children still are in school.

That also would rule out the idea of moving to St. Tammany or Tangipahoa and trying to win an expanded district there, while sacrificing her Jefferson and Orleans population for her

colleagues. She mentioned crossing into Lakeview, which would add whiter, conservative voters but worsen Murray's quandary.

Sens. A.G. Crowe, R-Slidell, and Jack Donahue, R-Covington, said St. Tammany's options are fairly clear independent of Quinn.

Crowe may shed St. Bernard

Crowe, whose district now reaches from central Tammany to the marshy tips of Plaquemines Parish, said he plans to give up St. Bernard and Plaquemines parishes, which lost population. He could then live in an eastern Tammany district that picks up population gains in Donahue's sprawling district and

Sen. Ben Nevers' multiparish district. Donahue would then be drawn into a district oriented to western Tammany.

St. Bernard and Plaquemines still would need population to make a district. Crowe said that could come from Heitmeier's Algiers-Terrytown precincts. That would create an open Senate district that includes the residence of Republican House Speaker Jim Tucker, who is term-limited in the lower chamber.

It also would necessitate westward ripples: Heitmeier could replace lost constituents by picking up majority black, Democratic precincts from Alario, who recently switched from Democratic to Republican; Alario

could then absorb precincts from Chaisson's district, which is likely to be part of a River Region domino effect, along with Sen. Joel Amedee's 18th District.

Amedee's district is the most heavily populated in the state, with 40,316 more residents, 33.7 percent, than ideal. That means his district, which now reaches into St. James and St. John the Baptist parishes, likely will contract around his Gonzales residence and possibly create an open seat that covers many of Chaisson's constituents.

For years, Amedee said, New Orleans was the center of power in the Legislature. Now, he said, "Let's look at where the people are and share the strength."

“LET’S LOOK AT WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE AND SHARE THE STRENGTH.”

SEN. JOEL AMEDEE

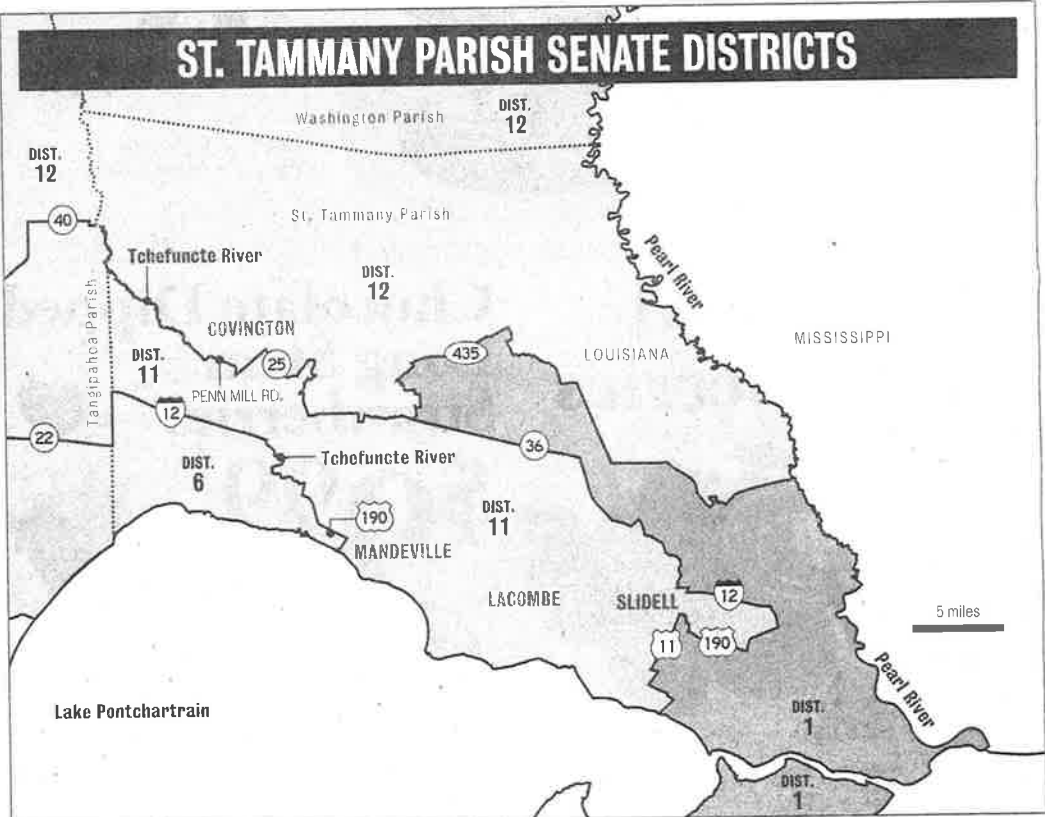
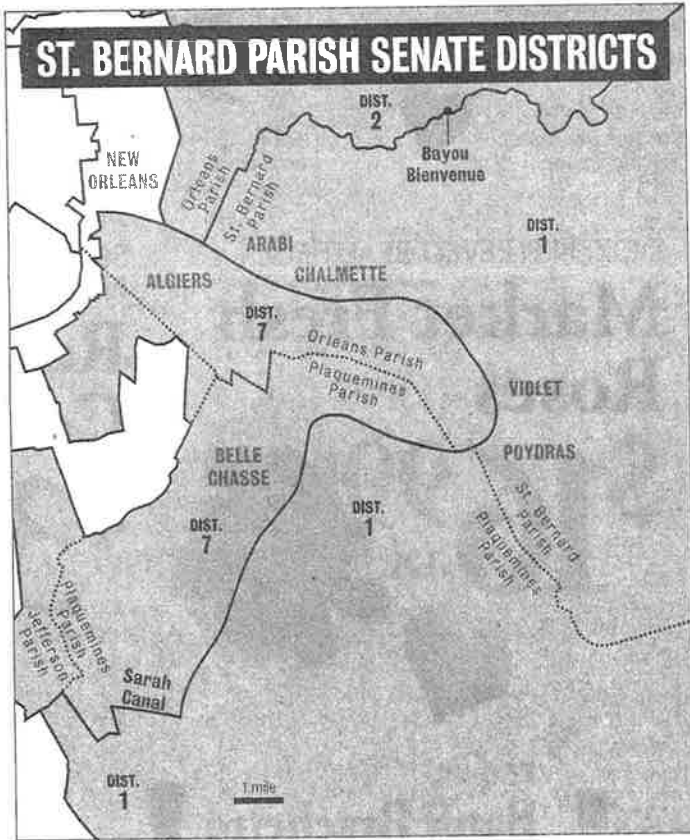
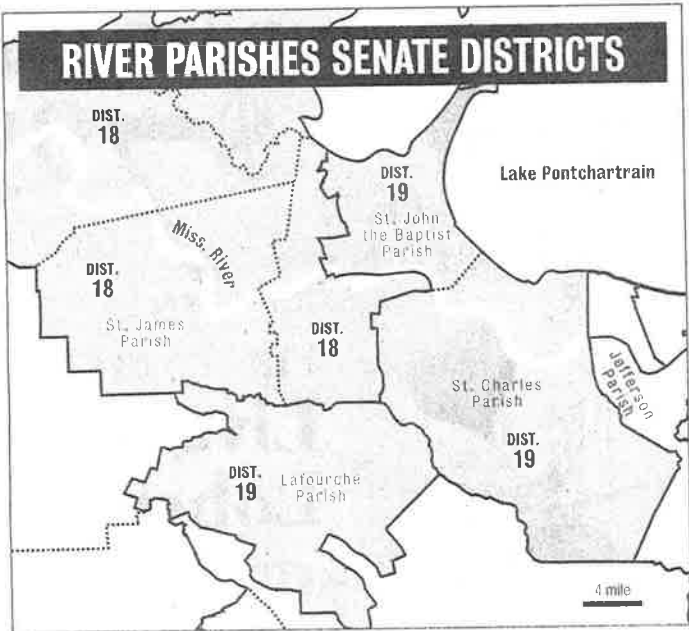
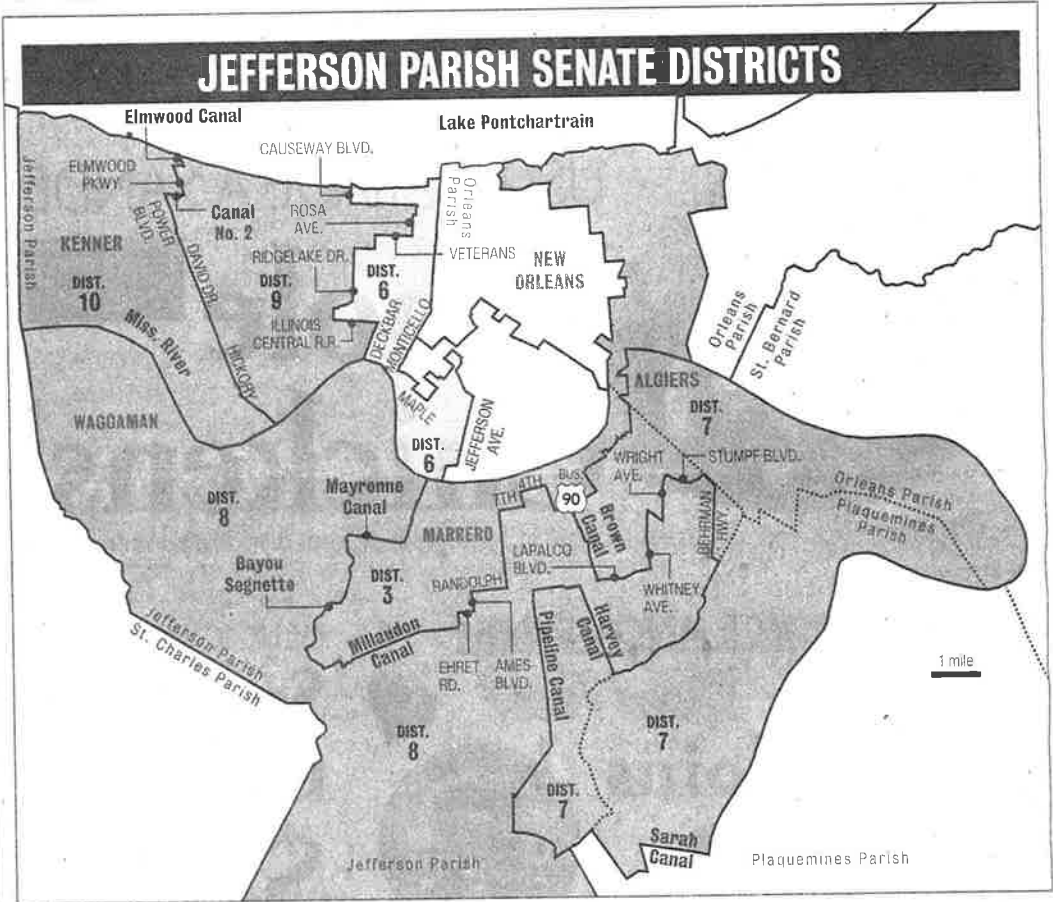
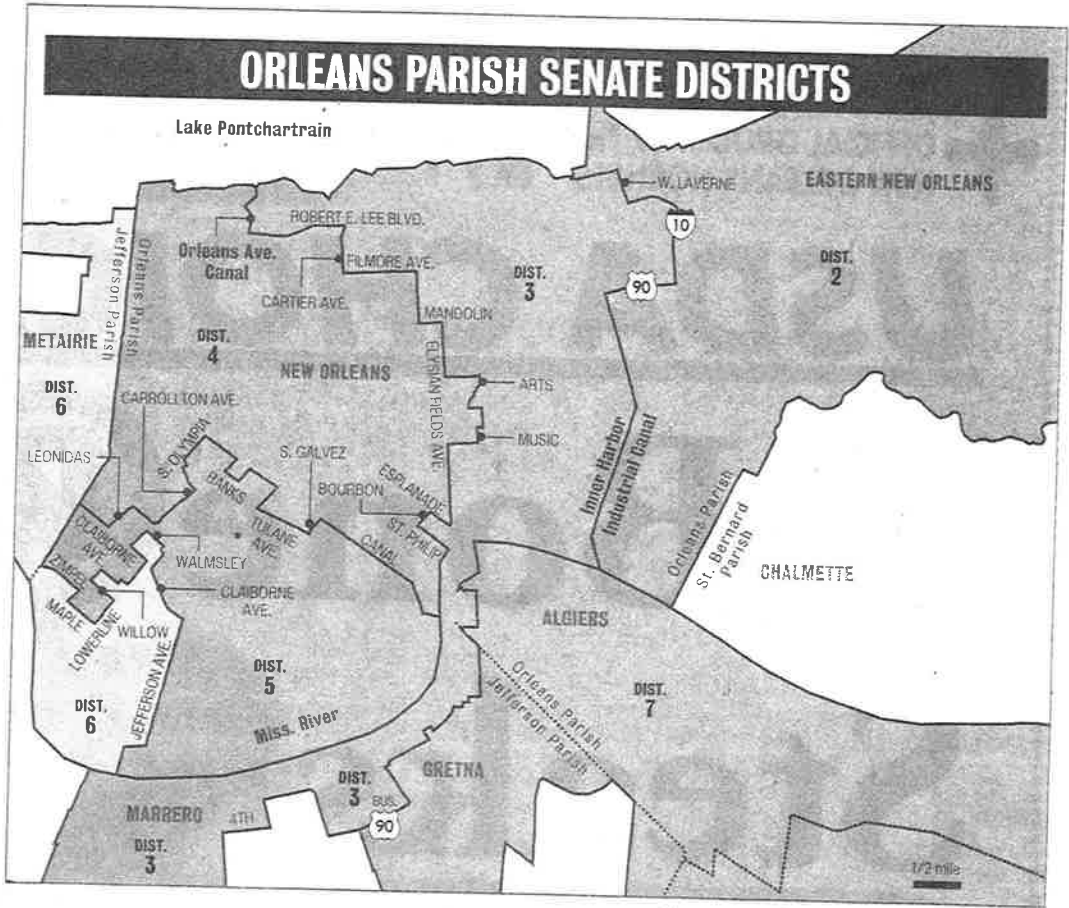
senator from Gonzales has the most heavily populated district in state

LOUISIANA SENATE REDISTRICTING

The Legislature will convene March 20 to redraw federal and state district maps using data from the 2010 U.S. census. The ideal population target for Senate districts – the state's population divided evenly among 39 districts – is 116,240. Historically, the U.S. Justice Department allows deviation of plus or minus 5 percent, a range of 110,428 to 122,052. There are currently two districts in the New Orleans area (**in bold type**) that are still at an ideal size.

		ABOVE IDEAL		BELOW IDEAL	
District	Senator	Population	Ideal	Raw difference	Percent difference
1	A.G. Crowe	89,476	116,240	-26,764	-23.02%
2	Cynthia Willard-Lewis	65,868	116,240	-50,372	-43.33%
3	J.P. Morrell	79,418	116,240	-36,822	-31.68%
4	Edwin Murray	71,484	116,240	-44,756	-38.50%
5	Karen Carter Peterson	82,088	116,240	-34,152	-29.38%
6	Julie Quinn	137,299	116,240	21,059	18.12%
7	David Heitmeier	110,828	116,240	-5,412	-4.66%
8	John Alario	113,097	116,240	-3,143	-2.70%
9	Conrad Appel	108,304	116,240	-7,936	-6.83%
10	Danny Martiny	105,968	116,240	-10,272	-8.84%
11	Jack Donahue	143,310	116,240	27,070	23.29%
12	Ben Nevers	136,047	116,240	19,807	17.04%
18	Joel Amedee	166,556	116,240	40,316	34.68%
19	Joel Chaisson*	127,628	116,240	11,388	9.80%

*Barred by term limits from running this fall.



Source: U.S. 2010 Census

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